

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER
1989

PLEAS AND THANKS

Many thanks to all those offered moral support and promised articles for the Newsletter following my plea in the last issue. Particular thanks to this month's contributors Brian Bicknell, Ruth Brown, Murray Fieldhouse. Sheila Willis's article is held over till the next issue.

Please keep the material rolling in! Our copier makes a reasonable job of line drawings and black and white photographs so you are welcome to include these in your contributions. Material for the next issue should be with me before Friday 1st December.

The next issue may not be out before the December meeting, so put this in your diary now - details are inside.

FAREWELL TO PAIR LADY

Murray Fieldhouse

The Guild sends Elsa Benattar every good wish on the eve of her move to the market town of Crewkerne on the Dorset, Devon, Somerset Borderlands. There she will have the choice of three Guilds upon which to bestow that enthusiasm and generosity that have distinguished her unstinting work for us over the years as a committee member and afterwards.

The special ambience she created in her surroundings with its extensive collection of crafts pottery and other intriguing artefacts meant that she was constantly 'invited!' to put up our lecturers and demonstrators and rarely found it inconvenient. She also persistently talked and charmed many first class potters into demonstrating for us when they might otherwise not have done so.

We are indebted also to Ivor who suffered the pottery talk of many outlandish guests. He also served who was consecutively our auditor and treasurer for a number of years. We shall miss their help, but trust not their good company from time to time.

Elsa's new address is:

Bridge Cottage, 10 West Coker Hill, West Coker,
Nr YEOVIL, Somerset

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FUN AT THE AGM ?

In her report as Chairman, Chris Bull highlighted changes in Committee Members' responsibilities. Many thanks are due to Tony Plessner who is stepping down after many years as Guild Treasurer, and to Valerie Williams who is giving up organisation of the annual Potters Open Day. Both leave on a high note - with the Guild finances in a very healthy state and no increase in subscriptions this year; and a record attendance of 170 at last years Open Day.

Valerie has agreed to soldier on in the role of Secretary, since no-one has yet come forward to lift the burden from her shoulders, in spite of the attractions of committee membership which she spelt out in her report. This was part of her plea for members (and there are now 113 of us) to take a more active part in running the Guild.

Last year the Guild had an excess of income over expenditure of £250, thanks mainly to the successful Potters Open Day, and now has reserves in money and equipment of £1900. Tony Plessner, in his Treasurers report, called this a healthy situation. He said that the photocopier still continues to absorb money for repairs but at present it is still economic to carry out our own copying.

The annual exhibition was disappointing, in spite of some high quality pots and an attractive display set up by Chris and Helen Bull and Gill Brown. The organiser of the exhibition, Ruth Karnac, said that public attendance was poor partly because Watford Library is not an ideal venue. But more important, Guild members had not supported the event - not more than a dozen exhibited pots and very few turned up for the private view. Ruth proposed some changes for next years exhibition: it would last for one week only to overcome difficulties with stewarding, there would be no handling fee so that members could exhibit without feeling the pressure to sell, a pool of stewards would be organised well in advance, and there would be no theme (although Ruth did say that she would welcome 'wacky' teapots - the more outrageous the better).

Individual members voiced a number of concerns: the benefits and disadvantages of a single day or weekend 'Pot Crawl' relying on individual or group transport, the level of commission taken by the Guild on pots sold at the exhibition, and the problems of manning and finding suitable venues for the exhibition. Winifred Mitchell made a plea for help in finding potters willing and able to come and speak at our monthly meetings.

Frances Reynolds has left the committee and Jenny Templeton rejoins it. Current members are Christine Bull (Chair), Alan O'Dell (Vice chair), Valerie Williams (Secretary), Gillian Longland (Treasurer), Brian Bicknell, Gill Brown, Ruth Karnac, Winifred Mitchell, Tony Plessner, Jean Sedgley, Digby Stott, Jenny Templeton, Roger Winn.

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And for those members who avoid AGM on principle, you missed a rare treat in Abdo Nagi's delightful presentation of his pots and what inspires them.

NATURE AND ISLAM IN POTS

In the past we have invited a member of the Guild to talk on their work after the necessary mechanics of the AGM. Last year Mildred kept us happily entertained, and on this occasion Abdo Nagi perpetuated the tradition.

Many of you will be fully aware of the work of Abdo, but for me it is completely new. This may be of advantage as I can comment without preconceived ideas.

The influences on Abdo's work come from his childhood in the Yemen. It was there that he became aware of the natural shapes of stones, seeds, flowers, and the shapes of buildings in Sana. The second influence was the colour, of millet, plants and the wonderful blue-greens of the mosque domes.

A story could be told of his wanderings to Aden during the last years of British rule, and of his eventual arrival in London. To do so would alter the purpose of this write-up, but it does illustrate the richness of experience that shows so clearly in the shapes and colours of all he does.

The first slide was of a large pot to hold bread. The base shape was that of a flower pot with a banded rim. This was decorated with representations of millet seeds. Below the rim were inverted triangles representing green leaves. The domed lid repeated the millet motif to the apex and finished with a bold curved stalk.

This set the tone for all that followed. A succession of bowls, pots, jars etc., all showing a mastery of colour that to me is near perfection.

Some of the earlier pots were wood ash glazed. I am aware that some potters use apple, hawthorn or whatever is their speciality, in the purest form without additions or oxides. Abdo's experiments with various ideas to produce dramatic effects of movement run counter to this. One particular tall pot was dipped in a temoku glaze followed by a mixed wood ash glaze, and then strayed with an oxide and rutile. The effect was outstanding giving flows of colour and areas of mottled interest. The rutile acted as a flux causing the interaction of the glazes to produce random colour patterns.

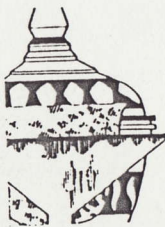
Within the potter is the artist, always looking at colours and shapes. On looking for a shape for a jug, Abdo's attention alighted on some ducks. Their oval shapes, upright tails and raised heads produced two beautiful abstract pots, one male and the other female. One was sold, leaving the other still in Abd's possession.

To summarise the evening, I believe everybody captured the friendliness of the talk and the beauty of the pots shown on the screen. It is always appreciated when samples are brought along for us to see and buy. Just to lift and touch the surface gives great pleasure.

I have written this as just an outline of what interested me as a relative newcomer to pottery. Much more was shown and discussed. My intention is to give a flavour of the evening in the hope that our members interests will be aroused and swell the audience numbers.

Many thanks to Abdo for the effort and time spent by him in preparing for this evening.

Brian Bicknell



ABDO NAGI
POTTERY & CERAMICS

Abdo Nagi began his talk by telling us about his early life in the Yemen, living in a remote area with little contact with the outside world.

His father was a wood carver and his mother, who was Turkish, looked after the family in a home with no access to running water. It was Abdo's job to walk a mile to collect it, and to look after the goats. All around him were natural objects - pebbles, rocks - and forms of nature. It was an area of great natural beauty, said to be the Garden of Eden.

The nearest town was fifteen hours walk away and on the rare occasions that he went there, Abdo learned of places and things existed beyond his world, and he wanted to learn more.

When only twelve years old, he walked to Aden, to the south, and eventually obtained work, first in hotels, and then in private homes. He was brought to England by his British employers, who, sensing his talents, suggested that he join classes at North Herts Art College. Eventually he attended Middlesex Poly. Since he completed this course, Abdo has been self-employed and earning his living as a potter.

Whilst preparing work for his college diploma, it was natural that he turned to his past for inspiration.

His breadbins had domed lids reminiscent of minaretttes; his storage jars resembled natural forms, with details added in clay and sgraffito.

We saw many slides of pierced shapes for lamps, large porcelain bowls and sculpted shells. Blues, with both dramatic and subtle results, appeared on many pots, and these were obtained without cobalt, by using mixed woodash, iron, rutile and other oxides.

As part of his project, Abdo worked on glazes, using tenmoku, manganese and woodash, overlapping to achieve rich results; he also used Emmanuel Cooper's barium glazes with woodash and oxides.

Many of his bowls were used as vehicles for his glazes. One dish or bowl with a wide base carried a most beautiful glaze, the effect achieved we were told with woodash and tenmoku. As many as five glazes may have been applied, usually brushed rather than dipped. In some instances this caused bubbling, but the bubbles were rubbed down with an abrasive block and the pot refired.

Once a satisfactory effect has been achieved and found to be reliable, the glazes are used on stronger forms. His work is coiled and thrown, slipped then scraped. The planetary forms, inspired by the space trip of Voyager II, were spheres with 'etherial' and 'atmospheric' glazes. However, the pots which most caught my imagination were his 'duck jugs', the forms based upon a convex line joining a concave base, inspired by ducks on a park lake. The most poignant of these were the 'crying' bird forms, with open beaks demanding food; a statement of sorrow, or maybe anger, for the starving people of the world.

I liked this potter's work, and so, I think, did everyone present.

Ruth Brown

GUILD EVENTS

Potters Open Day

POTTERS OPEN DAY

RUDOLF STEINER SCHOOL
LANGLEY HILL
KINGS LANGLEY HERTS

Saturday
18th November
9.30a.m. to 6.00p.m.

WILLY CARTER
DOMESTIC WARE

DEREK CLARKSON
STONEWARE - PORCELAIN

PETER BEARD
TEXTURED SURFACES

GORDON COOKE
CERAMIC SCULPTURE



DACORUM AND
CHILTERN
POTTERS GUILD

£16 including lunch: £14 members
Bookings to:
Valerie Williams
5 Saxon Close
Letchworth
SG6 4RF



Christmas meeting

Friday 8th December at Northchurch Social Centre,
8-00 pm Bell Lane, Northchurch, Berkhamsted.

The Christmas meeting is the event where we get away from pottery and make fools of ourselves trying to learn some other skill - this year its Corn Dolly making. We are helped, (or hindered) by mince pies and punch. If you have not been to a Christmas meeting recently, try this one.

OTHER EVENTS

Buckinghamshire Pottery and Sculpture Exhibition

25th November to 2nd December at Amersham old Town Hall
10-00 am to 6-00 pm

FOR SALE

Wengers 'Capacity' Electric Kiln

6 cubic feet (internal dimensions: 18" x 20" x 28"high);
12kW single phase; £100 - buyer to collect;

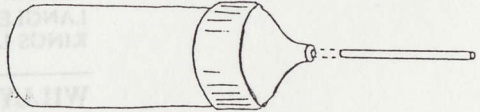
Elsa Benattar (0442-864592)

More P G Tips

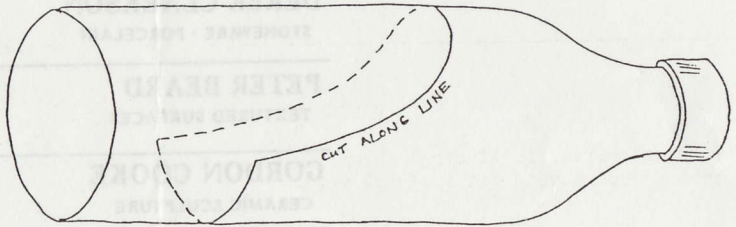
Uses for non-degradable waste

Chris Bull

Make a slip trailer from an empty 'Perm' or Hair Colour bottle and the inside of a biro pen (having washed them first). Cut about 1.5 inches of ink barrel from the pen and use this inserted into the nozzle of the bottle to make the trailer.



A plastic bottle can be cut with a sharp knife to make a useful scoop.



Wasting electricity to save time

Chris Bull

Use a hair dryer to speed up the drying process when waiting to add handles or knobs to pots.

WHO DOES WHAT?

From time to time (see the letter from Rena Green) the Guild receives enquiries about whether there are members who make certain items, can provide particular services, take commissions or give demonstrations. It is hoped that we can compile a register with this sort of information, and publish details in the Newsletter.

If you are interested in being included please fill in the slip below and send it to Alan O'Dell (address given elsewhere in this newsletter).

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____

Particular interests _____

Whether commissions taken _____

LETTERS

I have recently had some enquiries at my workshop for 'house plaques'. If anyone makes such things could they please contact me.

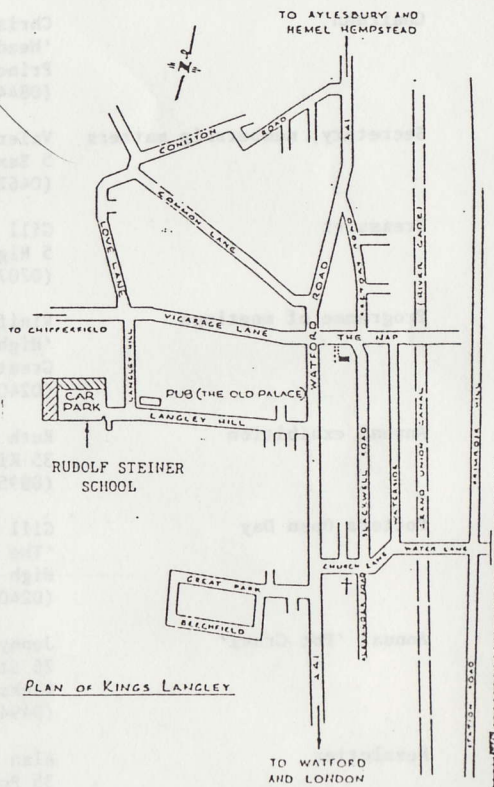
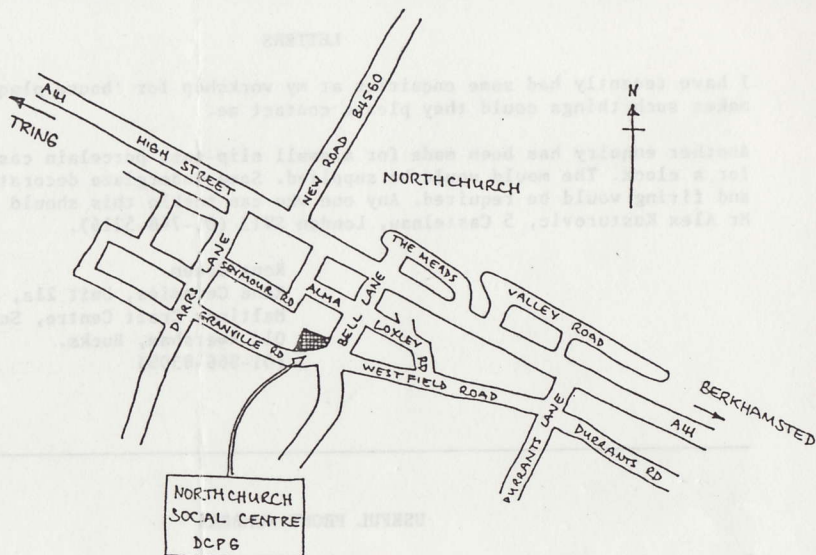
Another enquiry has been made for a small slip-cast porcelain case (about 4"x3") for a clock. The mould would be supplied. Some underglaze decoration, glazing and firing would be required. Any one who can tackle this should contact:
Mr Alex Kusturovic, 5 Castelnau, London SW13 (01-748-5216).

Rena Green
Rena Ceramics, Unit 21a,
Maltings Craft Centre, School Lane,
Old Amersham, Bucks.
(01-866-8308)

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

Your committee is always looking for new ideas and suggestions. These are the people you should get in touch with.

Chairman	Christine Bull 'Meadowcroft Cottage', Askett Lane, Askett, Princes Risborough, Bucks. (08444-3515)
Secretary, membership matters	Valerie Williams 5 Saxton Close, Letchworth, Herts, SG6 4RF. (0462-686765)
Treasurer	Gill Longland 5 High Grove, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 7DW (0707-23252)
Programme of meetings	Winifred Mitchell 'Highwaite', Stony Lane, Little Kingshill, Great Missenden, Bucks, HP16 ODS. (02406-4324)
Annual exhibition	Ruth Karnac 35 Kingsend, Ruislip, Middlesex, HA4 7DD. (08956-31738)
Potters Open Day	Gill Brown 'The Dove Cote', Hunts Hill Lane, Naphill, High Wycombe. (024024-2679)
Annual 'Pot Crawl'	Jenny Templeton 26 St Leonards Road, Chesham Bois, Amersham, Bucks. (0494-727243)
Newsletter	Alan O'Dell 35 Pondfield Crescent, St Albans, AL4 9PE. (0727-69383)



MEETINGS VENUES

Northchurch Social Centre
(monthly meetings)

Rudolf Steiner School
(Potters Open Day)

PLAN OF KINGS LANGLEY